

view to resolving once and for all the dispute between cyclists and walkers who battle over congested space on Regent's Canal towpath, writes Andrew Johnson.

The canal, which runs

a popular east-west link for cyclists and pedestrians wishing to avoid congested roads.

Now, British Waterways, which is responsible for maintaining the canal, has

released until tomorrow but the proposals include:

- Introducing more chicanes and speed control measures to slow down cyclists;
- Widening the towpath;

spokeswoman said none of the proposals is "set in stone" and everything was up for discussion. The consultation will be carried out with

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Occupy London group fight order to quit building empty for 3 years



Squatters from the Occupy London movement at the former Moorfields Primary School in Clerkenwell

SQUATTERS: WE STAY IN SCHOOL

SQUATTERS from the Occupy London movement who have taken over a disused school say they expect to be there for at least a month.

They are appealing against a possession order served on Tuesday for the former Moorfields Primary School in Clerkenwell which has been empty for three years since its merger with Prior Western.

Despite a hard-fought campaign by residents, the site was sold to housing

by ANDREW JOHNSON

association Southern Housing Group in 2009 for about £8.35million by the Liberal Democrats who then ran the Town Hall.

Original plans to build homes on the site were rejected because there was not enough affordable housing in the proposal. The association has, however, won permission to demolish the building and has submitted new plans to build a mixture of

private and affordable homes.

About 18 squatters are now living in the building, after entering last week. They occupied the school after being evicted from the UBS building in nearby Sun Street, which they had turned into a "Bank of Ideas" which staged talks by university lecturers and visits by Thom Yorke of Radiohead and members of Bristol group Massive Attack.

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Squatters set up 'school of ideas'

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Pete Phoenix, one of the squatters, said they now wanted to turn Moorfields, in Finsbury Street, into a "school of ideas". About 150 people, including local residents, had attended workshops over the weekend, he added.

The new Occupy site is just a few hundred yards from Finsbury Square, which is still occupied by protesters who originally gathered at St Paul's Cathedral before Christmas.

Mr Phoenix added that the group was hoping they could negotiate with Southern Housing to stay in the building until it was ready for demolition.

"This is a community resource that could have been used for the last three years," he said. "There is a playground that children could have been using and a basketball court that's become overgrown. We've cleared that now and tidied up."

"We've got university professors who want to give lectures. At the Bank of Ideas we had the Green Party's Jenny Jones and Mark Thomas talking. For three years there could have been youth clubs here, kids could have been playing on the slide, old people's groups, all run by volunteers. This is David Cameron's Big Society but instead they just keep evicting us."

Southern Housing's original plan for a seven-story building and 121 homes was thrown out in March last year because it would have overshadowed the adjacent grade I-listed Bunhill Fields

Cemetery, where the poet William Blake is buried. There were not enough affordable homes in the scheme, which was opposed by more than 200 residents.

Now, the association has plans for a five-storey building with 65 homes.

A spokeswoman for Southern Housing said the existing building was not safe for squatters as demolition had begun. The Tribune could see no signs of demolition on Wednesday.

The statement added: "The site was occupied by Mulalley [a construction company] in order to undertake demolition works. The work underway at the time included invasive asbestos surveys prior to removal."

Squatters had been told the site was unsafe. "There are serious safety risks to any occupation of the site buildings," the statement added. "It is additionally concerning that the public have been invited into the site by the occupants. They are holding up the redevelopment of the site, which will include much-needed affordable housing."

The occupiers deny the building is unsafe and stress that, although the public cannot visit, guests can.

● The Town Hall has begun a consultation over the future of Moreland School, in King Square estate, Finsbury. The council is rebuilding the school, but says extra space will be made available.

Council planners want to use the space for affordable housing. Residents can comment until March 16.



'Don't build on them, fill up all the empty'

by PETER GRUNER

HOUSING chiefs in Islington are being urged not to "sardine" yet more homes onto already overcrowded council estates, but instead to make more use of the borough's empty properties.

Leading activist Meg Howarth spoke out after figures from the national Empty Homes Agency revealed there were 1,122 empty residential properties in the borough – just over half council-owned – and 1,564 empty shops.

Islington Council has angered residents at 16-storey Ilex House in Stroud Green with a plan to build a six-storey block of flats on the Hol-

ly Park estate's car park. The scheme would mean the demolition of the estate's community centre, although the council maintains it would be replaced by one of a similar size.

The council argues that it is cheaper and less disruptive to build new homes on existing estates than it is to acquire and convert existing empty properties.

Ms Howarth has called for a land value tax to deter owners from speculating on their properties by keeping them empty for lengthy periods. She has urged

the council to provide short-term housing for squatters in empty properties, similar to schemes allowed by local authorities back in the 1980s.

"The law needs to be changed so that properties are not allowed to remain empty for years," she said.

"Many could be refurbished to provide homes for people on the waiting list. In affluent Barnsbury there are, for example, at least three very long-term privately owned empties within a five-minute cycle ride of one another."

Ms Howarth said that Islington's former environmental health offices

Chicanes plan to slow traffic

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Islington Council, Friends of Regent's Canal, Islington Cyclists Action Group, Hanover Primary and Nursery School and Islington Living Streets.

A statement from British

Waterways added: "The Regent's Canal towpath is a very busy walking and cycling route. During 2011, British Waterways introduced trial speed bumps and chicanes to help slow down cyclists in a hurry and rebalance the towpath towards pedestrians,

who have priority. A also been submitted to Transport for London. Greenways programs improve alternative cycling routes on boro

Full details of the consultation will be from tomorrow at So

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